

The Charles Viewer

Winter - 1970





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THE CHARLES VIEWER

Winter — 1970

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Editor: Judith Marcy

Editorial Staff

Kathleen Coffey
Christine Lucas
Patrice Rawlick
Patricia Vicari
Sandra Wilson

Contributors

Judith Marcy
Janet Peters
Janet Rossi
Andrea Simard
Cheryl Tattersall
Kathryn Warren
Shirley Zukowski

Faculty Adviser

Ruth E. Shore

Christmas Dreaming

At first glance, Jack, a small boy of four, looked exactly like an Irish leprechaun with his curly red hair, freckles scattered across the bridge of his nose, sparkling blue eyes, and a turned-up nose.

The holiday season was drawing near, and the stores had already decorated their windows with garlands of hemlock strung from corner to corner, huge wreaths with big, red satin bows, and Christmas trees with beautifully decorated packages lying underneath.

As Jack ambled down the streets, pausing to look into every display window, he dreamed about the kind of Christmas he would have. He'd wake up early Christmas morning, even before the sun had come over the horizon, and run down the winding staircase, or maybe he would slide down the banister to save time, into the gigantic living room with its massive fireplace, in which the flames were still licking at the logs. Trying to jump high enough to reach the top of the mantle, Jack would jerk his overflowing stocking off the tack, and very carefully, making sure nothing should fall out, would make his return journey to his bedroom. He would climb into the warm bed, with its soft, patterned puff and slowly pick out of his stocking one item at a time and examine it very closely. There would be oranges, apples, a candy cane, and nuts to eat, plus the little toys he had wanted, the mini-trucks, the play gun, the crayons.

Now, as the sun was beginning to cast a soft glow into his room through the window, Jack thought it would be time to wake the remainder of the family and go downstairs to open the presents which awaited them under the tree. The lights on the Christmas tree would illuminate the living room with a brightness which reminded Jack of Christmas morning. Each member of the family would sit on a chair, while Father would hand out the gifts very meticulously. Jack thought maybe he did this on purpose to augment the anxiety and excitement. The presents would be opened one by one, and everyone would watch while the other person opened his gifts.

Later, after all the presents had been opened and carefully laid under the tree for display, everyone would sit down to a plentiful Christmas dinner of roasted, golden turkey with all the trimmings. Grace would be said by the youngest member of the family, and everyone would offer his own prayer of thanks. For dessert, there would be the traditional plum pudding.

The day would end very quietly with the children playing with their new toys, and Mother and Father sleeping soundly by the fire.

By the time Jack had awakened from his daydreaming, he realized he had almost reached home. As he walked past the huge black-iron fence, he could see the sign on the iron gate of the massive, seven-story, faded gray building. It read GREENMEADOWS ORPHANAGE.

— CHERYL TATTERSALL

The Athlete

Dad worked very hard at his office job, but he did not have much time for exercise. Though he was in good physical shape, Mom thought that he should start a program of physical fitness.

"Why me?" he asked piteously.

"You could use the exercise," she said firmly.

"But my back. . ."

"Your back is fine."

"What will the neighbors think?"

"They'll all be jealous of your wonderful physique. Besides, if you set a good example, others will follow."

As you may have guessed, Mom decided that Dad should take up jogging — it was "in."

"All the big business men do it," she assured him.

When Dad came home from work that evening, Mom was waiting for him. She held her hands behind her back and demanded that Dad guess what she was holding.

"A martini?"

"Guess again."

"My slippers?"

"Don't be silly!"

A resigned look came into his eyes, and he guessed once again.

"A jogging outfit?"

"Right!" she exclaimed, and showed him the nice new sneakers, the white running shorts, and a red, white, and blue sweatshirt.

"Wonderful," he said weakly, as Paul and I snickered. Dad glared at us and we retreated, still laughing.

Promptly at six the next morning, Dad was pushed out the door and told not to return for half an hour. Fifteen minutes later the doorbell rang. Paul opened it, and Dad collapsed on the floor, moaning about his poor, broken back.

Without a word, Mom led him up the stairs, put him under the shower, and turned on the water full blast. The scream that was heard became known as the "scream heard round the neighborhood."

Nothing was said of this when Dad came home that night, because he wouldn't talk to any of us. Every time I looked at him I started to laugh, until finally he got so annoyed that he stomped angrily from the table, muttering about "mutiny in the ranks."

For the next few mornings he did not complain, but went out at six and returned at six-thirty. When he came in, looking very

unruffled, he would say something pleasant, get changed, and go to work, not even stopping for breakfast.

Mom became very suspicious at this, and she later found out that she had reason to suspect him. Mrs. Jones, our next-door neighbor, told her that Dad met Mr. Jones at the drugstore every morning for coffee and doughnuts.

When Mom heard that, she decided that Paul and I would accompany him the next morning to make sure that he did what he was supposed to. We started to complain at this, but then we thought it over and decided that it might be fun.

At six the next morning, all three of us were outside, accompanied by Hector, our dog. Dad did not look too happy with his company, but started off at a brisk pace. We jogged along quietly, going more and more slowly, but at least going.

Hector seemed to think we were too quiet. He began calling for his friends to come join him. Soon, half the dogs in the neighborhood were following us up and down the street. They also thought we were too quiet: so they started to serenade the neighborhood. All of them seemed to be in very good voice that morning as the doggy chorus shattered the six o'clock air.

Dad decided that flab or no flab he couldn't take any more of this. He jogged determinedly for the house, through the door, stopped in the kitchen, and said to Mom, "I'm turning in my shorts," and jogged up the stairs.

Mom finally gave in and decided that he shouldn't have to jog if he doesn't want to. Now she wants him to take up surfing.

— JANET ROSSI

Conformity

PART I

- June 14: As I walked back to my room today I could still see the giants letting their tongues come rolling forth, spouting information to be utilized on some new flight to the moon. All I ever see is that room, day in and day out, with a slight rest in between. I seldom speak with anyone because that sort of thing is really frowned upon. I guess they feel that we're easier to control if we can't put our thoughts together. The same tedious work every day for the rest of my life is my only future.
- June 17: Today one of the giants ceased to pour forth information. It was unusual since they rarely ever stop functioning properly. They are constructed so supremely that they are nearly infallible. It was quickly repaired by one of the more advanced giants. I can remember when I used to fix them. I realized it was only a matter of time before I would lose that job. At least it gave me something to look forward to. Now, I haven't anything.
- June 19: I am really getting tired of this room. The only sound I hear is the constant clicking of the giants at work. Seldom do I hear a human voice.
- June 20: I had a dream last night. That's really against all rules because we might get ideas which would have a bad influence on us. I saw them replacing me. They had taken me away and someone else was at my place. Everyone in the room was different; even the giants looked new. I don't know where they took me or any of the others. Was I dead?
- June 23: I had another dream. This time I saw myself as a very minute creature contained within a little box. As hard as I tried I could not get out and no one came to rescue me. Did they know I was there?
- June 25: I have decided that I can no longer exist here. I need something new. I am alive but I am dead. There is really no way out. It's like being enveloped within four walls that will never cease to exist.
- June 30: I screamed as loud as I could and I cursed this wretched place as I ran through the halls today. I'm sure that someone will tell them. And I talked while I worked. I really did not work very well either. They should notice that

too. It will only be a matter of time. But I can't exist here any longer without going insane.

July 1: They reacted quite promptly. Shortly after I arrived this morning they came for me. They took me to another building. It was the most beautifully constructed building I had ever seen. So this is where they hide themselves! The four of them have all the luxuries available while the rest of us exist like animals. They live like supreme beings.

I was brought into a room and given some sort of test which I tried not to do very well on. I don't even know what it was supposed to prove. Later they took me to this room and left me here for the night. It is a much pleasanter room than my own. Maybe I will work here now.

PART II

July 2: They gave him some old clothes and took his away. He was escorted down a dark, dingy passageway. No one spoke; only the sound of water trickling through the pipes could be heard. Every now and then he thought he heard groans coming from different directions, but it was so dark he could barely see. Suddenly they halted and someone reached down and opened a hatch. One of them hollered for him to get in. He backed away. One of them grabbed his arm and twisted it till he let out a shrill cry of pain. They took both his arms and lowered him into a hole. The black was even blacker than it was above. He reached out looking for a wall or anything. The room was small and was furnished with only a bed. The odor in the black pit was nearly unbearable.

His whole body felt weak and helpless. He was frightened. There wasn't a sound to be heard. He thought he could hear his heart racing away inside of him. It sounded like a drum, only it kept getting louder and louder till he thought that it was going to burst through his chest. Then it stopped.

He searched for the bed and lay on it for a long while trying to recollect his thoughts. What had happened to him and where was he? He had no idea. He was alive but then he felt as if he were dead. But that's where he was before — alive but dead! And then he slept.

- July 2: Today he thought about his past and then about his future. Maybe his life before was not really as horrid as he imagined it to be. He pondered the idea but it was in vain. He found no solution. What was he destined for? The thoughts which entered his mind made his body feel limp. The sweat poured down his forehead. The room was like a furnace pouring out more heat every minute. He felt the walls; they were hot and sticky. There was nothing for him to do.
- July 3: He tried to sing to himself. After a short time he could not even hear that. Time was meaningless. Dark haunted him day and night.
- July 5: He made a discovery today. He remembered his button. He pulled it off his shirt and began to throw it up and catch it. He threw it up and caught it. He threw it up again but he heard it hit the floor. He searched for it and found it. He continued this process for three days.
- July 8: He woke up with his button in his hand. He threw it up and it fell. He found it and threw it up again and he waited for it to fall. But it never fell. He could not understand it. He kept listening but it just never fell. Now there was nothing. His head began to pound furiously. He lay on his bed and listened and listened but the sound he listened for never came.

It was not long after that he ceased to exist. They came for his body. A light cut into the black of the pit and as it moved about the room it fell upon the little white object entangled in the web of a spider, never to be freed.

— ANDREA SIMARD

The Weekend that Was

It all started when two girlfriends and I decided to spend the weekend in Maine. On our arrival, we were invited to a party at another home. The eight of us jumped into three sports cars and were on our way.

Everything happened so fast. One minute we were driving down the road and the next minute something was wrong. The brake lights in front of us started flashing. The car I was in had left the road, and we were in the air. My mind just wouldn't accept the rest and I blacked out.

One of my girlfriends had been thrown out; shaken up, but unharmed, she crawled up the hill to flag down a car for help. Shortly help came, and the police arrived on the scene. The other girls were helped to an ambulance. One had a broken arm and the other a deep laceration in her leg. One of the boys had been immersed in gasoline. He acted very strangely until they calmed him down. At this point, I was screaming and yelling because of the excruciating pain in my back and neck. The car I was in had landed sideways. The driver was able to crawl out the top. The police proceeded to drag me up through and pull me out the top, which caused me to scream all the more. One of the boys who wasn't hurt ran over immediately and told them not to move me until they had the car upright. He had had life-saving in the navy. He showed the police how to handle me when they took me out, as it was obvious that I had back injuries.

All this time, I had been blacking out and coming to intermittently. When I woke up the next day, I was in a hospital room with a halter-type gadget on my head to which sandbags were attached. I never actually saw this contraption, but my sense of touch helped me to fix in my mind what it must have looked like. When I awakened, everyone who had been in the accident and all the parents from home were there. My mother couldn't control herself and had to be taken out. The doctor told them not to excite me. Everyone related to me how the accident actually happened.

It seems that we were all traveling downhill and at the base of the hill was a turn. Due to the speed at which we were all traveling, the turn couldn't be manipulated. The gravel at the base of the hill prevented us from stopping; so all three cars went off the road and into a ditch. That day in the hospital seemed like a dream, mainly because I was so medicated. I felt I was going to wake up any minute. Everything seemed abstract. My doctor told me how lucky

I was, that my life had been saved by the quick thinking of the boy who had been in the navy. He said that I would probably be paralyzed or not alive at all, if it were not for my navy friend. He also told me that it would be six months before I could be moved and that would be only to a hospital back home. Nothing affected me. It was as though everyone's words were bouncing off the walls. I heard people speaking but they may as well have been talking about someone else.

I was medicated every three hours. The shots usually put me to sleep for three hours and when I woke up, I would need another shot right away. I was like a drug addict. The pain was unbearable.

I stayed at the hospital for four days and then was transferred to the Maine Medical Center in Portland. The doctor found that I needed an operation; so I was going to be placed in the care of one of the best neurosurgeons in the East. My ambulance was met outside Portland by a police escort. The driver of the ambulance yelled to them that he had to go slow because he had a broken neck aboard. Reality really hit me then. I had never thought to ask anyone what my actual injuries were: I thought I had a broken back. Anyone I had ever heard of who had broken his neck had always died. The doctor's words came back very clearly in my mind and I knew how lucky I really was right at that very moment.

I was met at Maine Medical by my new doctor. A nurse shaved the sides of my head, two needles were stuck in each side of my head, and the doctor began drilling holes in my head with a little hand drill. The doctor stuck tongs into my head and placed me on a circo-electric bed. Then he extended a rope from the tongs in my head, and attached weights to the rope. I was now immobile, and I would have to get used to the position of lying flat on my back for many weeks to come. I was then put in the Special Care Unit where I remained for a week. I slowly began to improve and then I was transferred to a private room. My mother came to Portland to stay with me until I was transferred. The pain in my back began lessening day to day and I was beginning to feel a little like myself.

After I had been there a month, I was operated on, and a bone was taken out of my hip and wired into my neck to stabilize the fracture. Before my operation, my neck didn't bother me much, but after the operation, the pain was unbelievable. My body was like a pin cushion from all the shots that I received.

I progressed slowly as the days passed on. The days became longer and the mental and emotional strain almost got the best of me. What really straightened me out was learning that a boy my

age who had come into the hospital one morning with a broken neck was almost completely paralyzed.

Eventually I was put in a regular bed. The tongs were taken out of my head and I graduated to a collar. That was an exciting day for me.

My ninth week in the hospital, the doctor informed me that due to the success of the operation and my fast progress, I would be able to go home in a week. I was ecstatic. Now the task was to get me on my feet and walking before I went home. The day the doctor came in and told me that I was going to stand up, I was really excited. He made me go through the procedure of getting out of bed all by myself. This consisted of turning myself over on my stomach, an ordeal in itself, and working my way over to the edge of the bed to get my feet on the floor. From there, I had to push myself up with my arms, which the doctor had to help me do, since I had no strength whatsoever in my arms. My head weighed heavily on my weak neck muscles. The doctor held me in a standing position. When I finally got my balance, I just stood there, feeling the floor beneath my feet, crying and laughing. I was actually standing up, after nine weeks flat on my back!

Now I had the problem of learning how to walk all over again. My legs were uncoordinated and my knees kept giving way. For fifteen minutes every hour, I was walked around my room; then I graduated to the hall. At first I needed two nurses to help me, then only one, and before I knew it, I was walking alone.

I went home nine weeks after I had arrived. I remained with collars for four months. To this day my neck is still stiff, but to me this is just a remembrance of the close call I had with death, and a constant reminder of how fortunate I am to be alive today.

— SHIRLEY ZUKOWSKI

The Flight

Peter awoke to the fast rumble of a jet flying low over the house. He rubbed his eyes as he tumbled out of bed, and still half asleep, ran to the open window and looked out. It was a hot sunny August day. The world looked the same as it had yesterday — yet something was different. Peter's tummy felt funny, as it had on the first day of kindergarten. What was it that made him feel this way? Sighing, he plopped down on his bed to think. He cupped his chin in his right hand. With his left hand he held on to his right elbow. Daddy always did this when he wanted to think: Peter guessed it helped one's thinking. His bright navy blue suitcase lay open on the floor where his chair had been, waiting for his mommy to finish packing it. Now he remembered! Today was the day he and his mommy were moving to the city away from the Air Force base.

Quickly Peter dressed himself, all except his shoe laces because his six-year-old fingers hadn't acquired the skill for tying yet. He ran into the kitchen where his mommy was sitting at the table reading the morning paper.

"Mornin' Mommy."

"Well, hello, sleepy head," replied his mother kissing his cheek. "Hurry and eat your breakfast, luv. As soon as you are done, we will leave," she said as she tied his shoe laces.

Peter climbed into his chair and folded his hands and bowed his head. "God is great. God is good. Let us thank Him for our food. Amen." Daddy had taught him that prayer.

"Go out and play while I finish up here, Peter," said his mother when Peter had finished his breakfast.

Peter was glad to get out. There was something he must do. Looking both ways he crossed the street and ran up the hill. He knew just where to go; he had been there with Daddy many times before. At last the airport. Now quickly he skipped to Hanger #1. By standing on tiptoe Peter could just open the great door a crack — just enough space for him to step in.

Peter blinked his eyes to get used to the dimness after the bright sunlight. Where was Daddy's jacket that hung on the hook behind the door? And where was his new green tool box that mommy had given to him just last June on Father's Day? Could, could it be true? No! it couldn't be true. He had to think. He cupped his chin in his right hand. Oh! of course, how silly of him to forget. Daddy was probably on a long flight mission for the Air Force, and had taken his jacket and tool box with him.

Breathing a sigh of relief, Peter ran out of the hanger and down the street to say good-bye to his friends.

It was a warm day in October. Peter was lying on his tummy in a pile of colored leaves watching a small brown bug crawl along the path.

A little girl with black-buckle shoes ran past. She didn't see the bug. SQUISH! The bug didn't move anymore. This was death. Death was the tiny goldfish that didn't swim anymore because Peter had forgotten to feed them. Death was when Peter and Daddy watched the new chickens hatch from the eggs. As they watched, Peter noticed that one didn't move around and get fluffy like the rest. He pointed this out to Daddy. Daddy picked up the small, limp chick and said, "Don't feel sad, son, but the little chicken is dead." Death was when Mommy brought his new baby sister home from the hospital. All that Marylee ever did was cry and cry. One day she went back to the hospital, and never came home again, and Mommy cried.

Peter knew what death was. Death was something that happened to small and weak things, things that were sick and couldn't get better and grow up big. Daddy couldn't be dead. No, Mommy was wrong. Daddy was big and strong, and he was never sick. He was in the Air Force, and one had to be strong to be in the Air Force. No, the Viet-Cong couldn't kill Daddy.

Quickly Peter got up and ran across the Commons to his new home. When he reached the apartment building he didn't even wait for the elevator, but ran up the four flights of stairs.

"Mommy!" he cried as he burst into the apartment. "Mommy, where are you?"

"Here Peter, what is it?" he heard his mother call from the living room. Quickly he ran to her.

"Mommy, is Daddy really dead?"

"Yes, Peter," sighed his mother, "I am afraid so."

"How?" sobbed Peter, "he was big and strong, not weak."

"I know Peter, but even big strong people can die."

"Why did he have to die?" Peter cried. "He was my daddy."

"Peter," said his mommy, "he died for you."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. You see, Peter, he died so that you can grow up in a free land as he did. He wanted you to be able to go to school and

be in Cub Scouts, and when you are older he wanted you to have the chance to go to college and work and live where you wish. He wanted you to be able to say, "I am an American," and be proud of it. There are many people who aren't as brave as your daddy was, and they will tell you your daddy died in vain — don't ever believe them Peter; and besides, there are many more daddies like yours who have given their lives and who are giving their lives for their children."

Peter cupped his chin in his right hand. Several minutes later he climbed into his mother's lap and kissed her tear-streaked cheek.

"Don't be lonely, Mommy. I am here. Do you suppose we could get a puppy?"

— KATHRYN WARREN

Identificative Retribution

Place — Small town with a garbage plant along the river and a dirty pond.

Time — Tomorrow

Scene I.

Paul — The Giants won again last night.

Lucius — O yeah. They're coming up slow but sure. What place are they in now?

Paul — Third, but they're only a game and a half out.

Lucius — Say, by the way, Paul, have you heard the plant manager turned into a fish yesterday? I guess it could happen to the best of us.

Paul — (not paying any attention) Wow! That rookie Waterman of theirs is really looking good.

Scene II.

Office of the *Sullied City Times* — Local Newspaper.

Spector — That's seventeen so far.

Pathos — What do you mean — "That's seventeen so far?"

Spector — Well, it is, isn't it?

Pathos — Yeah, but they used to be people, you know, like you and me, good workers. The town, the economy, the plant — They'll all really miss those seventeen.

Spector — (from the telephone) It's twenty-one now. A family of four just converted over on Muddy Water Way.

Pathos — Why fish, I wonder?

Spector — How should I know? Maybe they're trying to tell us something.

Pathos — What about all those ridiculous fish all over the place? What are we going to do with them?

Spector — Who knows? (on second thought) At least People know how to take care of their garbage!

Scene III.

(At Spector's Home)

Spector — Hi, Honey, how are you?

Honey — Fine, Dear. Johnny's turned into a fish.

Spector — Oh? When did this happen?

Honey — He said he was fishing and just turned into one.

Spector — I just don't know about these kids today.

Honey — What's wrong with your arm, dear?

Spector — I don't know. It — it looks like scales — not scales?

(pause) Why? Why me? What have I ever done wrong?

Honey — There seems to be some sort of a pattern here.

Spector — I love my town, my job, our garbage plant, our nation,
our flag.

Honey — I know dear. Please try to be calm, will you?

Spector — (Tarzan yell) Back to Nature! Yeah, that's it. We'll
all go back to cleanliness, health, and happiness.

Scene IV.

(Outside)

A multitude of scales covers the streets and fields.

— JANET PETERS

The Good, the Bad, and Mr. Willy

Like a running child, my Maine-coast summers rush through my mind, pausing only for a moment and then charging on to the next great adventure. I am never certain whether the summer I learned to row was the same summer I was allowed to swim over my head, or whether that was the summer I was big enough to go alone to fetch water. Was that the summer I fell out of the hammock and broke my collar bone; or was that the summer I slipped on the seaweed and broke my leg? The one thing I am sure of is Mr. Willy.

Although he still remains a mystery to me, Mr. Willy stands out in my summer memories even more vividly than my first fish or my very own little row boat. I never knew where he came from or even his full or real name — I just knew that he came. Every summer after the star flowers turned to bunchberries and before the raspberries were ready for jam, Mr. Willy's truck would appear at the fork in our road.

I remember waiting impatiently for low tide so I could run across the chocolate-pudding clam flats in the cove which always made me giggle as it exploded between my toes, and scramble over the seaweed-slippery barnacle-scratchy rocks to see Mr. Willy. He would pick me up, put me on his knee, and ask if I still remembered the double sheepshank or the running half hitch he had taught me a summer ago. (Or was it the one before that?) Oh yes, I remember knotted brown hands, looking a part of the coil, feeding me rigging as big as my arm until I finally learned to get it square; and I remember the ripples that ran from his Atlantic-gray eyes to the whitecaps of hair at his temples. But mostly I remember the stories, with which Mr. Willy could fix broken dolls, cut feet, wounded egos, or skinned knees, stories that left no recollection of the sad event which had produced the tears.

Mr. Willy had a gold tooth, which was the source of many tall (but heartfully believed in my innocence) tales. Once the tooth was given to him by a whale he had saved; and one time he found it at the bottom of the sea while helping a lost seal find its way home, still another time by an eagle whose egg he had returned to her nest. Invariably the tooth was the reward for being good and I began to act in an almost angelic fashion (or at least I felt this to be the case, although I am sure my grandmother, with whom I spent my summers, would disagree). Unfortunately, certain incomprehensible biological factors were causing my teeth to fall out, and I could only hope that this was not my punishment for previous

misdemeanors — preferring to think that the new teeth would be golden as a result of my exemplary behavior.

Goodness seemed Mr. Willy's mission, for he was unable to believe in anyone's being completely bad. It is only recently that I have been able to understand how one man taught me, without my ever realizing it, about the beauty of life. Some years later as I walked along on the rocks in front of his little white sanctuary, closed and shuttered against the oncoming winter, (regretting not having seen him for several summers as I was working) one particular story flooded my memory.

Often, I have thought of this particular story, and always I remember a little girl who overheard two elderly people discussing the caretaker of a large summer home across the bay. Being terribly afraid that *her* freckles were a sign that she too would grow as bad as they said the caretaker was. I ran to ask Mr. Willy if I was bad, and he explained to me, more beautifully than I could ever hope to again explain, goodness and evil.

When a man is born, he may be any number of colors on the outside, but inside is his soul, truly more important than any external appearance. Souls are born a pure halo-white and can only be colored by the person within whom they are trapped. White, however, is an extremely sensitive color — easily stained — and for every lie, wrong, or hurt committed, the color becomes darkened. Black souls, dark as an unfathomable abyss, are created by those who recklessly hurt, unaware of the pain they inflict; but such darkness is extremely rare since it is easily faded by apologies, guilt, resolutions, forgiveness, and goodness. The pure soul is doomed to dinginess since all, either intentionally or inadvertently, create some stain which cause gray to be the primary spiritual status among men — the degree of gray being chosen by the individual. Outside colors can only deceive those too blind to look for the soul, and can only contribute to the ignorance of those who are unwilling to determine their true color.

Yes, I remember Mr. Willy and the warmth of a man who cared enough to give one little girl a more beautiful life.

— JUDITH MARCY



